

# Sports

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## Allison: Spring practice closes with 'a lot of positives'

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**Gainesville** - Union County High School's boys of fall proved they aren't too shabby in the springtime either.

On Friday night, Union County football concluded its two-week spring session -- the program's first since 2013 -- with a 28-17 scrimmage victory at Class AAAA's Chestatee.

The Panthers offense managed to shed its early rust following a sloppy opening series that led to a quick three-and-out.

The War Eagles' opening drive featured a steady dose of leading rusher Nick Lyles (1,327 rushing yards in 2016) before stalling inside the Union County 10-yard line, resulting in a 27-yard field goal.

Trailing 3-0 after one quarter, Union responded with 14-unanswered points on a pair of Cole Wright touchdown passes to Chayton Schaffer and Kyle Morlock.

"I thought we did really well, we were very competitive, and our guys were flying around," head coach Brian Allison said after the game. "We didn't have any turnovers and I don't think they had any either, although, we had a chance at an interception and missed it. We also missed a few tackles, but overall, there were a lot of positives to take away from tonight."

The Panthers got on the board after keeping the War Eagles out of the end zone for the second straight possession when they stuffed a handoff for a loss on 4th-and-short at their own 5-yard line.

Union would take over at the six and drive 94 yards for the score -- capped off by a 39-yard end-around by Schaffer that resulted in the rising junior receiver diving across the goal line after outrunning a Chestatee defensive back for the pylon.

However, the drive nearly stalled inside the five when



Union County rising junior wideout Chayton Schaffer takes an end-around shovel pass for 39 yards and the score. His TD gave the Panthers the lead at 6-3 and they would never trail again. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Panthers drew a pair of penalty flags -- one that negated a 25-yard, first-down carry by rising junior running back Chad Buzzard.

Later in the drive, Buzzard would move the chains with an 11-yard run that was followed up by a 31-yard hook up from quarterback Cole Wright to Morlock -- a rising-sophomore wide out. On the completion, Wright rolled to his right, forcing the defense to bite before lobbing a perfectly placed touch pass into the outstretched arms of Morlock, who tacked on 10 more yards with his legs before getting pushed out at the War Eagle 40.

Following a short completion to Sawyer Drake, Schaffer went in motion to his right and took a shovel pass from Wright and raced 39 yards down the Chestatee sideline for a score.

Leading 7-3, the defense forced a punt and the offense went back to work deep inside its own territory. On first down from the eight, Wright hit rising-sophomore Cayden Rich for 12 yards, then a give to Cole Dockrey went for 10 more.

Two plays later, Wright, sporting a red "no-contact"

jersey, scrambled for 15 before the play was whistled dead by the officials at midfield.

Union kept the drive alive with consecutive 5-yard bursts up the gut by Dockrey and Buzzard, then a facemask penalty set the Panthers up with a fresh set of downs inside the War Eagle 25.

A check down to tight end Austin Pattee went for two, then a low snap was scooped up by Buzzard, who battled back to the line of scrimmage. Facing a 3rd-and-8 from the 20, Wright rolled left and connected with a sliding Logan Dyer at the 10 for a 1st-and-goal.

On 2nd-and-goal at the nine, Wright found Morlock in the front corner of the end zone for six.

Brian Smith nailed his second point after of the game to give Union a 14-3 advantage with 2:27 left in the second quarter.

One of the biggest question marks surrounding the 2017 squad is the offensive line play.

Union's front-five lost four starters to graduation and it's only returning starter, rising junior center Coleson Daniel, didn't dress for the

spring game.

With five new faces in the trenches, the Panthers' offense line was able to open enough holes for Buzzard and Dockrey to turn in a solid performance, while giving Wright enough time to throw two touchdown passes. Although, most of Union's pass plays had Wright rolling outside of the pocket.

"I thought the offensive line played pretty well," Allison said on Monday morning after reviewing the film over the weekend. "They were a little inconsistent at times but overall I thought they played well."

Chestatee would answer with an 8-yard touchdown pass on the final play of the first half when it appeared that the Panthers' defense would deny the end zone from the home team one final time.

A quarterback scramble went for nearly 40 yards when the Chestatee pass protection broke down and it appeared that Union County defensive end Kyle Williams had a bead on War Eagle veteran quarterback Storm Yarborough. Instead, the rising-senior QB was able to step up in the pocket to avoid Williams, then break free into



Returning quarterback Cole Wright threw for 2 scores in the first half as the Union County varsity led 14-10 at halftime. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Panther secondary before getting dragged down at the two.

As the clock ticked under a minute, the War Eagles tried to power their way to six points but the Purple Swarm defense, led by linebacker RJ Banton and nose tackle Matthew Beise, denied Lyles on consecutive hand offs.

A false start and another defensive stop later, Chestatee went play action and Yarborough found the tight end for a score on 4th-and-goal from the eight as time ran out in the first half.

As for the safety position -- another area of concern in 2017 -- they didn't draw as much praise as their O-line counterparts.

"We didn't play as well as I would like at safety," Allison said. "I would like for us to play a little better."

Up 14-10 to open the second half, the junior varsity squads took over and the third quarter closed with a swapping of touchdown passes.

Union struck first when rising-sophomore Pierson Allison found Alec Scott all alone in the endzone on a 3-yard scoring strike with 1:40 to play in

the quarter.

And for the second consecutive quarter, the War Eagles went to the tight end with no time left on the clock. This time they connected on a post pattern over the middle for a 20-yard touchdown pass to pull within 21-17 entering the fourth.

The 9th graders took over in the fourth and Union County freshman quarterback Kasten Hemphill tacked on another score with a 3-yard touchdown scamper with 4:59 remaining.

Hemphill's score came on the heels of a 32-yard screen pass to Mason McCombs, setting the Panthers up with a 1st-and-goal inside the five.

"We've had the 9th graders for nine days but I thought they came in and executed very well," Allison said. "The second group (JV) came in and played well. I know there's some small mistakes that we're making but we'll get them corrected."

Union County football will begin its summer workout session on June 1 prior to attending passing camps at Flowery Branch on June 9 and Habersham Central on June 16.



Coach Allison addresses his players after the scrimmage and praises them for one of the most productive springs in years. Photo/Todd Forrest



Rising junior defensive end / outside linebacker Kyle Williams shows off his vertical leap attempting to swat a CHS pass. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County track star Riley Barrett is bringing his record-breaking speed to the gridiron, providing the coaching staff with another weapon at wide receiver as well as cornerback. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman quarterback Kasten Hemphill is fired up after plowing his way into the endzone during the fourth quarter of Union County's spring scrimmage at Chestatee. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kicker Brian Smith and holder Pierson Allison watch the extra point sail through the uprights. Smith brings a stronger leg into his junior year and even drilled a 60-yard field goal during practice last week. Photo/Todd Forrest